DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 083 254 SP 007 454

TITLE	New Jersey Social Science Teachers Look at American Institutions.
INSTITUTION	Opinion Research Corp., Princeton, N.J.
SPONS AGENCY	Joint Council on Economic Education, New York, N.Y.1.
PUB DATE	Jul 73
NOTE	33p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Economics; *Inservice Education; Institutional Role; Political Attitudes; *Political Science; *Secondary Education; *Teacher Attitudes; Teacher Workshops; Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

This report presents conclusions of exploratory research conducted by Opinion Research Corporation for the Joint Council on Economic Education. The report explains that 52 New Jersey high school social science teachers participated in discussions designed to determine how economics and political science were being presented in the schools, to explore the feasibility of combined instruction for these two subjects, to measure the acceptance of organizations that furnished teaching materials, and to determine teacher attitudes toward workshops in socila science. Some of the findings reported are a) economics and political science were being taught as American History courses; b) practical application was the method used in teaching these subjects; c) teachers saw discrepancies between theoretical American institutions and the actual operation of these institutions; and d) teachers were interested in workshops and seminars in the social sciences. The text of the report contains individual hypotheses about the teachers along with typical comments from them concerning a) methods of teaching and suggestions for curriculum improvement, b) teacher attitudes toward free enterprise and the two-party system, c) student motivation, and d) workshops. (BRB)

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NEW JERSEY SOCIAL SCIENCE TEACHERS LOOK AT AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

An Exploratory Research Project

Conducted for

Joint Council on Economic Education

By

Opinion Research Corporation

Princeton, New Jersey

July, 1973

SP 007 454

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INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of exploratory research conducted for the Joint Council on Economic Education.

The objectives of the study:

1. To determine how economics and political science are currently being presented to students at the high school level.

2. To explore the feasibility of combining the teaching of economics and political science.

3. To measure the acceptance of organizations that furnish teaching materials in these social sciences.

4. To determine teachers' attitudes toward workshops in the social sciences.

Six groups of high school social science teachers took part in discussions led by members of Opinion Research Corporation's professional staff. The groups ranged in size from six to eleven teachers. Altogether there were 52 participants from the following New Jersey high schools:

Passaic Valley Regional

Butler

Pennsville Memorial

Union

Nutley

North Warren Regional

Following are background characteristics of the 52 participants:

Length of time teaching high school	
One year	1
Two or three	7
Four or five	10
Six through ten years	15
Eleven through nineteen	8
Twenty years or more	11
Educational background	
Bachelor's degree	3
Bachelor with some graduate work	17
Master's degree	13
Master with some work toward doctorate	19

The group discussions were conducted during the period May 24 through June 7, 1973.

The research was designed to produce ideas rather than quantitative results. Further, it should be kept in mind that many of the teachers who participated in the study have attended workshops conducted by the Joint Council on Economic Education.

SUMMARY

Following are key ideas that came out of the discussions. These should be considered as hypotheses that require testing among a broader sampling of teachers before they may be accepted as conclusions.

1. Economics and political science are currently being taught in high schools as part of American History courses.

   There is a trend toward "mini" courses that present specific political or economic problems as electives for the students.

2. Practical application is agreed to be the way to teach concepts in both political science and economics. Lecturing, teachers feel, will not do the job.

   In political science, practical application is achieved through mock elections, visits to city government offices, taking over city government for a period of time, working with political candidates.

   In economics, practical applications include visits to local businesses and banks, visits to the Federal Reserve Bank, students' buying and selling their own securities, students' making and marketing their own products, visits by local businessmen to the classroom.

   Games, simulating the real world, are also well regarded by teachers and, according to teacher testimony, by students.

3. Teachers recognize that they have an important role in training students to be citizens, breadwinners and consumers.

   But many feel that their own theoretical training is inadequate for the task.

   Further, they say that their influence is not strong enough to match that of television, or to combat the apathy of parents.

4. Teachers see discrepancies between theoretical American institutions and the actual operations of these institutions in the United States today.

   For example, teachers see the free enterprise system today as being one with considerable regulation -- how "free" is it?

   Similarly, in presenting the two-party system there is a dilemma. How, ask teachers, can they introduce a two-party political system when, in fact, the actual system is an overlay of liberal/conservative government philosophy within each of the two major parties?

5. Teachers perceive American institutions as composites of many compromises. But how do they present these institutions to the youthful minds that are likely to reject compromise? To many young people, things must be black or white, with no grey area of compromise between.

6. Teachers mainly attribute the failure of many young adults to exercise their voting franchise to lack of information about the candidates and the issues.

   Other factors that may keep young people from the polls are: the perception of no choice between the two major parties, reluctance to compromise, irrelevance of the political scene to the young person's experience.

7. Teachers have respect for the Joint Council on Economic Education. It is seen as unbiased, fair in its presentations. The workshops sponsored by the Joint Council are also well received. It is apparent that some organizations are criticized because they have their special axe to grind -- but not the Joint Council.

8. Teachers are interested in attending workshops and seminars. They feel that there should be some remuneration to them for their attendance -- academic credits would be appreciated.

   Timing is important. Summer workshops that keep teachers from earning extra money in summer school are not acceptable. Neither is exam time.

Teachers are critical of the faculty at workshops. They recognize good and bad presentation on subject matter. They are not likely to appreciate theoretical lectures. They want help in their practical problems.

Teachers are also critical of workshops that do not focus on the needs of a specific level of teaching. They don't want a mixture of grade levels within one workshop.

And, as they seek to provide practical learning experience for their students, they ask workshops for practical help in their teaching problems.

This group of teachers is highly favorable toward workshops conducted by the Joint Council. Many have attended such workshops and reported interest in attending more.

9. Teachers are looking for classroom materials that are inexpensive and applicable to their teaching problems.

   What materials may be meaningful in an industrially oriented school community may miss completely in a rural area.

10. The discussions suggest a course in "American Institutions," combining both economics and political science as they have developed in this country. But use games, practical application, and the extended classroom as teaching tools. Don't present theory until there is some actual experience with the institutions.

As mentioned earlier, none of these findings can be considered as conclusive. They represent hypotheses.

In the following detailed findings we present the individual hypotheses along with some typical comments by the teachers.

HOW ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE ARE CURRENTLY BEING TAUGHT IN HIGH SCHOOLS

IN MOST SCHOOLS ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE ARE TAUGHT AS PART OF THE REQUIRED HISTORY COURSES.

> For example, the concept of free enterprise and private property may be introduced with the development of the Constitution; labor unions with the origin of the labor movement in the late 19th century; and the Federal Reserve System in the early 20th century history along with study of the severe economic depressions.

THERE APPEARS TO BE A TREND TOWARD ESTABLISHING "MINI" COURSES WHICH WILL FOCUS ON SPECIFIC FACETS OF ELECTIVE SOCIAL STUDIES, AS WELL AS OTHER FIELDS OF STUDY.

> Teachers described these as short elective courses, of nine or ten weeks' duration. Initial reaction is favorable, among both teachers and students.

"Political science and economics are woven into history courses."

"Economics is incorporated into U.S. History."

"A mini course on the presidential election was a real success."

"Mini courses help create enthusiasm for learning."

"Next year we will offer quarter courses in political science and economics."

"Having five small unit courses in senior year was a big success."

"We plan to go into electives next year. They will be nine-week mini courses."

"Economic mini units are very effective with kids."

TEACHERS FEEL THAT LECTURING THEORY CANNOT DO THE EDUCATIONAL JOB IN ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE. INSTEAD, THEY OPT FOR PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE, AND MANY LIKE TO USE GAMES.

Practical experience in politics includes such things as students taking over city management for a period of time, mock elections in schools, trips to departments in the city government.

In economics practical experience is gained through visits to local businesses or banks, and visits by business people to the school.

Such practical experience has its drawbacks -- problems in scheduling, personality and the individual capabilities of the visiting business people.

Games are well received but pointed out to be expensive. Teachers have tried to put together their own games, in some cases successfully, in others not too successfully.

"Students can't handle theory. They can only relate to practical economics."

"Students have to see it firsthand; otherwise concepts are too abstract."

"It's not what you teach, but how you teach."

"Simulation games work well at teaching theory and how to apply it to practical situations."

"Through games students became very excited. They get a feeling for concepts."

"Games have been very successful at teaching economics and political theories. I find this one of the best ways to teach; I enjoy it and so do my students."

"Students like games. There is one called 'Economic System' which is very effective. Students learn how the farmer and the manufacturer function."

"A mock election was very successful."

"Students like to take over the city for a day. However they can only see an artificial view of what is going on."

"When students take over city government, it is a big success. They find out how the city runs and what it takes to get elected."

"Students predicted elections using sociological background data."

"Students bought stock with the rest of the class, then they followed the market very closely for a while."

"We take kids to the bank, and bring businessmen into classrooms. From these methods they are able to relate theory to what is really going on."

"We took the kids to the United Nations and to Washington. This was very good because they could now see what they have read in books and relate it to reality. These trips create great discussions."

"Students have trouble dealing with economic theory. They have trouble grasping concepts. They can understand it better if it's taught as part of something they know about or are interested in."

"I brought the Director of Welfare in the township into my classroom and he explained the welfare system. This was very successful."

MANY TEACHERS FEEL THAT THEIR BACKGROUND IN ECONOMICS IS INADEQUATE.

Teachers report having had one or two courses in college in which the professor taught primarily theory. Some of the teachers feel that because of their limited background, it is easier to teach politics than economics.

Most of these social studies teachers have attended workshops in the area of social studies. Those who have been to Joint Council seminars thought they were highly informative.

"I had a bare minimum in economics."

"I majored in economics."

"I have only six credits in economics.

"I had one semester course in economics."

"Many of us teachers have never had a course in economics in our college career."

"Teachers are not turned on by economics."

"It's easier to teach politics than economics."

"I like politics better than economics."

"Because of our background, which is poor, we have trouble understanding economic materials so that we can explain it to our students."

IN GENERAL, SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIONS ARE PERCEIVED AS QUITE COOPERATIVE.

Funds were more of a stumbling block than the administrations themselves. But some teachers apparently have problems in trying to change curriculum.

"We write our own curriculum. The administration does not interfere with us."

"We are in a good position to construct our program the way we want it."

"Our administration doesn't want to tell us how to teach."

"We can speak to the administration any time we want."

"One of the main problems in getting materials is the cost. The administration gives us only so much money."

"We have to make up our own games because we don't get much money."

"We are trying to work out a plan to change curriculum with the administration."

"The administration wants students to get involved with politics and economics but they will go only so far."

SUGGESTIONS FOR A BETTER CURRICULUM

ALMOST ALL OF THE TEACHERS BELIEVE THAT THE EXTENDED CLASSROOM IS VERY ADVANTAGEOUS FOR LEARNING ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND ECONOMICS.

Many of the teachers suggest that students have electives, use role playing and games in the classroom, and have outside speakers brought into the classroom. There is also a desire of some teachers, especially from rural areas, to have course material relate to student's environment.

The teachers believe that all aspects of social science can and should be taught at the primary grades.

"I believe in the extended classroom. I would like my classes to visit areas they are discussing."

"You get to more kids when you go out of the classroom and into the community."

"Take kids out of the classroom. For example, let them to go the court house."

"Theories can only be taught through games."

"We need a course in practical economics, one in which students can take theory and apply it to the real world."

"Students only can relate to themselves and don't care about anything else. They only want to learn about things that apply to them."

"Bring candidates to the classroom and let them speak to the class."

"Course materials have to be pertinent to students' life style. In this area it has to be related to farming."

"Students need mini electives. They do not like having one teacher for an entire year; they get restless."

"Role playing is very successful for teaching political concepts."

"Children can learn supply and demand at second grade level."

"We should start economics at the first grade level."

"At elementary levels students need visual materials to learn economics."

MOST TEACHERS BELIEVE THEY HAVE AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN PREPARING YOUTH TO BE CITIZENS, BREADWINNERS AND CONSUMERS.

On the other hand, whether or not they can fulfill this role is questionable to some. They see apathetic parents as a stumbling block, and some feel that television is much more of an influence on students than the classroom is.

"We have an important role in pushing voting."

"We definitely have and do feel a responsibility to educate students in the political and economic areas."

"It is the educational institution that should transmit the political and economic system to our young people. It is here they learn America's past, present, and possible future."

"We have an important role now because students have the right to vote."

"It is our obligation to teach how the two-party system works."

"TV shapes students' opinion."

"Newspapers influence how youth thinks."

"Students just repeat what their parents say or do."

"Young people follow their parents in voting."

"We do not have much influence on them. They parrot what they hear at home or on TV."

"Voting is a privilege. It can either be exercised or not. I do not think it is our responsibility to tell them to use the privilege. I don't like it when someone tells me to vote."

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THE FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM AND THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM

TEACHERS SEE DISCREPANCIES BETWEEN THE THEORETICAL FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM AND ITS ACTUAL OPERATION IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY.

To the extent that they perceive such discrepancy, they experience difficulty in introducing the concept in their classrooms.

For example, free enterprise implies minimum government regulation; yet students and teachers alike see evidence of considerable government regulation of economic institutions in the United States.

Perhaps the message here is to expose teachers, and through them the students, to a comparative course of economic systems operating throughout the world today.

"At no time in our history has minimum government regulation worked. It has either been a great deal of regulation almost creating an artificial economy, or no regulation at all."

"The more we progress, the more regulations we ask for."

"Theory is not really being put into practice. There is much government control."

"Government is taking more and more control through regulation."

"We have a modified free enterprise system."

"Students do not believe that we have a perfectly free enterprise system."

"Government has to set regulations to control their own needs."

"Government intervenes and forcefully runs economic matters."

DISCREPANCIES ARE ALSO APPARENT TO TEACHERS AND STUDENTS WHEN IT COMES TO CONSIDERING THE TWO-PARTY SYSTEM.

Many feel that the overlay of conservative/liberal factions in each of the two major parties has cancelled out the effectiveness of the two-party system. How, some ask, can you teach a concept that in reality does not exist?

"I do not teach about differences between the two parties, but show differences between conservatism and liberalism."

"People don't vote because of political party leaders. They are not offering the people enough choices for what they stand for."

"It's hard to distinguish between the two parties. We should be teaching more about the differences between conservatism and liberalism instead of Democrat and Republican."

"Should I teach what is theory or what is happening in reality? Do you teach what should be or what is?"

TEACHERS ARE NOT ABOUT TO SCUTTLE THE AMERICAN ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SYSTEM.

Throughout their discussions, the American system is viewed as superior to other systems. The problem is in interpreting compromise to the youthful mind that is most likely to see things as black or white, with no grey area between.

In fact, some teachers mention getting this point across when, in their history courses, they present compromise. Here again some teachers tell about role playing to get this concept through to the students.

"We all accept the American way."

"This is now the best system that exists."

"The system is not perfect, but it works out all of its problems."

"Youth does not see compromise as part of the political process."

"There is confidence in the American system. People realize that mistakes are made, but they feel secure."

"If it doesn't go their way, students quit. They will not get involved in situations where they have to compromise."

STUDENT MOTIVATION AND APATHY,

AS OBSERVED BY TEACHERS

THE TERM "ECONOMICS" UNQUESTIONABLY TURNS MOST STUDENTS OFF.

Students have difficulty with the theory and the terminology. But, as mentioned earlier, when extended classroom experiences and games are used to introduce the subject, some success has been achieved.

"When students hear the word 'economics,' they think of dull, heavy, dreary, dry charts and graphs."

"Students are afraid of economics. It's too demanding."

"Students are scared to take economics because they do not want a bad grade."

"Economic vocabulary turns students off."

"When they hear the word 'economics,' they want to die. It is the biggest, dullest word they ever heard."

"Students cannot relate theory to the reality of the world."

"Students enjoy going on field trips to visit industry."

"They cannot conceive economic theory unless they can put it into realism."

"Theory and definitions are irrelevant to students."

MOST TEACHERS AGREE THAT WHEN STUDENTS GET INVOLVED IN A POLITICAL ACTION SITUATION, THEY SHOW GREAT ENTHUSIASM.

During the past presidential election, many students took part in campaigning. In school, mock elections and campaigns were held and out of school some students actively campaigned for candidates.

"What is related to them, they are more interested in."

"Practicality is the key to helping students learn. Through this they ask real life questions."

"Students want to know what is going on now, not what has happened before."

"Students can enjoy economics when they can take a theory and apply it to reality. This is done through practicality."

"You learn to do by doing."

"As long as students are a part of it, they can learn economics. They learn more than reading out of a book."

WHEN ASKED TO CONSIDER WHY SO MANY OF THE YOUNGER VOTERS ARE NOT EXERCISING THEIR FRANCHISE TO VOTE, TEACHERS FEEL THAT LACK OF INFORMATION ABOUT THE CANDIDATES AND ISSUES IS A MAJOR CAUSE.

It is difficult for some young people to relate issues to themselves and their lives. In addition, as mentioned earlier, if the two-party system is not perceived as offering choices, there is little reason to choose up sides and vote. And reluctance to compromise, also mentioned earlier, may be another contributing factor in voting apathy among young people.

"Students felt that it was better not to vote in the primary because they knew nothing about the candidates."

"Students cannot see differences in party ideology. They see no difference."

"Students see no sense of belonging to a political party. They are confused over differences of two parties."

"My vote doesn't count is stated by students."

"'What difference does my vote make' is a cry of students."

"Students have trouble buying compromise in elections."

"People are very apathetic about voting. Most of the time, they know very little about the candidates."

"Students are disillusioned and frustrated. They have seen many distasteful events through TV and this has disillusioned them towards voting."

"Students are very apathetic towards voting. All they wanted was the <u>right</u> to vote."

TEACHERS' ATTITUDES TOWARD MATERIALS RECEIVED FROM OUTSIDE ORGANIZATIONS, AND TOWARD THE ORGANIZATIONS THEMSELVES

THE JOINT COUNCIL ON ECONOMIC EDUCATION IS WELL KNOWN TO THIS GROUP OF TEACHERS, AND IS HIGHLY REGARDED.

At the conclusion of the group discussions, teachers were asked to rate several organizations.

As shown in the table below, among the 52 participating teachers 43 know the Joint Council well enough to rate it.

> Least well known are: America's Future, National Schools Committee for Economic Education, and American Economic Foundation.
>
> It should be kept in mind that most of the teachers had attended the Joint Council's Seminar at Montclair State College.

Among the 43 teachers who know of the Joint Council, 30 gave it a "very favorable" rating.

	Know the Organization	"Very Favorable" Rating
Joint Council on Economic Education	43	30
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	38	12
Junior Achievement	32	11
Council on Economic Development	25	9
The Robert A. Taft Institute of Government	22	6
Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System (ACES)	16	5
American Economic Foundation	12	1
National Schools Committee for Economic Education	9	3
America's Future	6	0

These results are based on a question in a short self-administered questionnaire that was completed by each of the teachers at the conclusion of the group discussions. The results of the question are presented in detail on the following page.

4. For each of the organizations listed below, please indicate how favorable you are toward each one, by circling the appropriate number. We are interested in your impressions of each organization, even though you may not know some of them as well as others.

	Total Teachers	Don't Know It Well Enough to Rate	Very Favorable	Somewhat Favorable	Neither Favorable nor Unfavorable	Somewhat Unfavorable	Very Unfavorable
Joint Council of Economic Education	52	9	30	11	1	0	1
U.S. Chamber of Commerce	52	14	12	13	8	3	2
Junior Achievement	52	20	11	15	3	3	0
Council of Economic Development	52	27	9	13	3	0	0
The Robert A. Taft Institute of Government	52	30	6	11	5	0	0
Americans for the Competitive Enterprise System (ACES)	52	36	5	6	1	3	1
American Economic Foundation	52	40	1	8	2	1	0
National Schools Committee for Economic Education	52	43	3	2	4	0	0
America's Future	52	46	0	4	1	1	0

WHEN ASKED TO MENTION ORGANIZATIONS THAT SUPPLY HELPFUL MATERIAL, THE TEACHERS MENTIONED THE JOINT COUNCIL ON ECONOMIC EDUCATION MORE OFTEN THAN ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION.

Many of the teachers claim that much of the materials they receive are too sophisticated, but on the other hand, some feel they are too simple for their students. There also seemed to be a concern among teachers that many of the materials are too expensive and cannot be purchased by their school systems.

"I do not like materials that are propaganda."

"The Joint Council and ACES do not try to sell business, which is very good. We steer away from groups that sell ideologies."

"Some of the materials are below the level of the students."

"Filmstrips are often too simplified."

"Much of the material available is far above our students' level."

"A good daily newspaper is very helpful for teaching current events."

"Many of the materials just fall apart; bindings are not made well."

"Filmstrips are too elementary."

"Our Board will only give money to get materials from the Joint Council."

"Taft is very good in politics."

"Junior Achievement helps students learn about stocks and production. It's very good."

TEACHERS ARE LOOKING FOR MATERIALS THAT ARE INEXPENSIVE AND APPLICABLE TO CLASSROOM TEACHING TECHNIQUES.

There is also much concern for locating materials that relate to student interest and ability levels. Many of the teachers are quite interested in locating games that can be used in the classroom that apply theory to reality.

"Students enjoy playing economic games. They are very worthwhile."

"We want materials at students' level."

"I'm fascinated by games but we can't afford to buy them. We have to make our own."

"Good materials are ones that are at the students' level."

"We could not afford to have ACES come to our school."

WORKSHOPS IN AMERICAN INSTITUTIONS

THE TEACHERS FOR THE MOST PART SEEMED TO BE QUITE FAVORABLE TOWARD THE WORKSHOPS THEY HAVE ATTENDED.

Again the Joint Council on Economic Education was highly rated in this area.

One thing that most teachers do not enjoy at these workshops is sitting through long lectures. The teachers do however enjoy exchanging ideas with other teachers and learning new methods of teaching. They want to be involved with others in solving their common classroom problems.

"Workshops are very helpful when showing how to make economics more meaningful to the students."

"We have to attend seminars and workshops to eliminate economic incompetence.

"We need organizations that understand teachers' needs. Many groups do not know what we have to cope with."

"We don't want to hear dry speeches."

"It's very helpful when teachers are allowed to interact."

"I enjoyed it very much when teachers told of methods that worked in their classrooms."

"It was very helpful when I went on sociological trips that were part of a workshop."

"The Joint Council's program at Montclair was terrific. I learned new teaching methods and learned about new materials."

"I enjoy seeing people come in to demonstrate what they do in the classroom. This was done for all age levels."

"It is very helpful when they give out materials that have been used by other systems successfully."

"As teachers we enjoy seminars where they have experts in all different areas."

MANY OF THE TEACHERS FEEL THAT WORKSHOPS HAVE BEEN HELD AT TIMES THAT ARE NOT CONVENIENT FOR THEM.

Some of the teachers complain that they interfere with summer school, while others are not happy with seminars during school finals.

Some teachers suggested weekly night-time sessions during the school year.

"I don't like to attend after school; I'm too tired."

"Have workshops after summer school. If we miss summer school, we lose our jobs. I would like to see workshops held in August."

"Spring term is the worst time to have the seminars."

"Don't have them in the summer; it interferes with work."

"Try to arrange for one that meets once a week during the fall or winter."

TEACHERS ARE STIMULATED BY WORKSHOPS THAT SATISFY THEIR NEEDS: LEARNING NEW TEACHING METHODS, BEING EXPOSED TO NEW MATERIALS, SHARING CLASSROOM EXPERIENCES WITH OTHER TEACHERS, AND BEING ABLE TO IMPROVE THEIR BACKGROUNDS IN POLITICS AND ECONOMICS.

One thing that all teachers agreed upon was that they should receive monetary or school credit for attending workshops.

It was also mentioned by a few teachers that seminars should be limited to teachers at the same grade levels.

"I cannot afford to go to the workshop for three weeks and feed my family."

"I would like to get demonstration lessons on teaching methods."

"I would like to learn how to play simulation games at seminars."

"I would like to learn new teaching techniques."

"There has to be an incentive -- credit or money."

"I would want someone to teach at seminars who knows what is happening in the school systems."

"I'd like to learn new teaching methods that can be applied to the classroom."

"I'd like to learn role playing techniques."

"It is very helpful when materials, sources, and material lists are given out."

"I'd like a workshop on urbanism."

"I won't attend without receiving credit."

"Credit is a big deal when going to seminars."

"Teachers have different backgrounds in this field. Some of the seminars are above the heads of teachers, while other teachers consider them too basic. Seminars should be divided into elementary and secondary levels and also by background."